

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, AS, MARR

SUBJECT: PRESS STORIES ON PROPOSED OMEGA STATION

REF: (A) CANBERRA 0175; (B) A-220, NOV. 26, 1974

1. SUMMARY: A NEW SERIES OF STORIES ABOUT THE PROPOSAL TO LOCATE AN OMEGA NAVIGATIONAL STATION IN AUSTRALIA INDICATES THAT THE ISSUE IS STILL A LIVELY ONE IN AUSTRALIA. THE WAY THE ALP FEDERAL CONFERENCE AT TERRIGAL NSW FEB 3-7 HANDLES THE OMEGA QUESTION WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT INDICATION OF WHAT THE ALP'S LEFT WING THINKS OF THE ALP'S CHANCES OF WINNING THE NEXT ELECTIONS FOR THE FEDERAL PARLIAMENT.

2. STORIES CONCERNING THE PROPOSED OMEGA STATION APPEARED LAST WEEK IN THE "MELBOURNE SUN", THE "BIRSBANE COURIER MAIL" AND "THE CANBERRA TIMES". THE STORIES IN THE "SUN" AND THE "COURIER MAIL" ASSERTED THAT THE GOA HAD STARTED AN AROUND THE CLOCK WATCH ON U.S. BASES IN AUSTRALIA TO MAKE SURE THAT AUSTRALIA IS NOT BEING UNKNOWNLY USED AS AN OMEGA COMMUNICATION BASE. THIS ASSERTION IS PATENT NONSENSE. THE AUSTRALIAN POST OFFICE ROUTINELY MONITORS ALL RADIO FREQUENCIES USED IN AUSTRALIA ON A CONTINUING BASIS. THESE ARTICLES DID PROVOKE CONFLICTING STATEMENTS FROM QUEENSLAND PREMIER BJELKE-PETERSON AND THE SECRETARY OF THE QUEENSLAND TRADES AND LABOR COUNCIL, MR. FRED WHITBY. BJELKE-PETERSON SAID HE WOULD WELCOME A U.S. OMEGA

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COMMUNICATION SYSTEM IN QUEENSLAND - "....HE WOULD WELCOME ANY-

THING WHICH WOULD ASSIST U.S. ALLIES IN PEACE OR WAR." THE PREMIER ALSO TOOK THE OCCASION TO MAKE A STRONG ANTI-COMMUNIST STATEMENT ABOUT THE LATEST ATTACKS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM. CONVERSELY MR. WHILBY SAID THE TRADE UNIONS WOULD HAVE THE LAST SAY ON WHETHER AN OMEGA BASE WAS ESTABLISHED IN QUEENSLAND AND THE UNIONS WERE TOTALLY OPPOSED TO IT. "WE WOULD PUT A BAN ON COMPONENT PARTS," HE SAID. BOTH STATEMENTS WERE BASED UPON THE MISTAKEN ASSUMPTION IN THE "COURIER MAIL" AND "SUN" STORIES THAT THE OMEGA STATION WOULD BE LOCATED IN QUEENSLAND.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE STORY WHICH APPEARED IN "THE CANBERRA TIMES" WAS WRITTEN BY FRANK CRANSTON, THE PAPER'S RESPECTED AND GENERALLY ACCURATE DEFENSE REPORTER. CRANSTON SUGGESTS THAT THE LONG-VEXED QUESTION WITHIN THE ALP ABOUT THE PROPOSAL TO SITE AN OMEGA NAVIGATIONAL TRANSMITTER IN AUSTRALIA MUST COME TO A HEAD WITHIN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. HE PREDICTS THAT THE OMEGA ISSUE MIGHT BE VENTILATED AT THE FORTHCOMING ALP FEDERAL CONFERENCE IN TERRIGAL NSW, FEB 3-7, BEFORE A DETAILED STUDY OF THE PROPOSAL IS BROUGHT BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT. CRANSTON DESCRIBES OMEGA'S ALLEGED MILITARY CAPABILITIES AS "ONE OF THE FAVORITE SHIBBOLETHS OF THE LEFT WING OF THE ALP AND LEFT WING MEMBERS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT". HE GOES ON TO SAY:

"MUCH OF THE EVIDENCE GIVEN (ON OMEGA) TO THE PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE FROM WITNESSES INCLUDING THOSE EMPLOYED BY THE GOVERNMENT, CONFIRMED THE GENERAL BELIEF THAT OMEGA IS BUT ANOTHER AND MORE EFFICIENT ELECTRONIC VERSION OF THE LIGHTHOUSE BUT MOST HAD TO CONFIRM THAT IT COULD BE USED BY NUCLEAR SUB-MARINES AS A CHECK IF THEY REQUIRED IT.

"IT IS ON THIS TENUOUS BASIS THE CONFERENCE DELEGATES WOULD OPPOSE IT AGAIN BUT AS THEY CANNOT BE GIVEN ACCESS TO THE REPORT BEFORE PARLIAMENT HAS IT THEY WILL BE WORKING WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE.

"WHAT IS EXPECTED AT CONFERENCE IS MUCH INVICTIVE AGAINST OMEGA AS PART OF THE U.S. NETWORK OF INSTALLATIONS IN AUSTRALIA WITH THE NAVIGATION FACILITY AS THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE ATTACK." END QUOTE.

4. CRANSTON'S ASSERTION THAT THERE WILL BE A FIGHT OVER OMEGA AT THE ALP FEDERAL CONFERENCE DIFFERS MARKEDLY FROM THE VIEWS OF DAVID COMBE, FEDERAL SECRETARY OF THE ALP. AS REPORTED IN CONFIDENTIAL

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REFERENCE A, COMBES SAYS THERE IS NOTHING IN THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE FEDERAL CONFERENCE'S DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS PLATFORM WHICH SHOULD CAUSE THE USG TROUBLE, AND HE PREDICTED THAT DISCUSSION ON OMEGA WOULD CONTINUE TO BE STALLED.

5. COMMENT: CRANSTON, A SKEPTICAL NEW ZEALANDER, TAKES A DIM VIEW OF THE ALP'S LEFT WING. HE BELIEVES THEY ARE MISINFORMED AND NAIVE ON DEFENSE MATTERS AND EXPECTS THEY WILL PROVOKE A

FIGHT ON OMEGA TO FURTHER THEIR OWN POLITICAL INTERESTS AS
OPPOSED TO THOSE OF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT AND THE ALP AS A
WHOLE. COMBES AS FEDERAL SECRETARY OF THE ALP OBVIOUSLY HOPES
AND BELIEVES THAT THE ALP WILL CLOSE RANKS ON DIVISIVE POLITICAL
ISSUES IN A PERIOD OF ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY WHEN THE ALP'S
POPULARITY IS DROPPING IN THE POLLS. IN ANY EVENT THE ISSUE
WILL BE JOINED SHORTLY. A MAJOR FIGHT ON OMEGA AND DEFENSE
INSTALLATIONS AT THE TERRIGAL CONFERENCE WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT
INDICATION THAT THE ALP'S LEFT WING HAS CONCLUDED THAT THE ALP
CANNOT WIN THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION AND THAT THEIR MAIN
CONCERN IS NOW TO PRESS TO CONSOLIDATE SUPPORT FOR THEIR OWN
IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS WITHIN THE PARTY. AT THE 1973 ALP FEDERAL
CONFERENCE THE DEBATE OVER OMEGA HELPED TO DIVERT ATTENTION AWAY
FROM A DEBATE ON U.S. DEFENSE INSTALLATIONS IN AUSTRALIA. LABOR
LEADERSHIP CLEARLY INTENDS THAT DEBATE ON OMEGA THIS YEAR WILL
SERVE THE SAME PURPOSE. HOWEVER, EQUALLY CLEAR THAT ALP "LEFT"
DOES NOT FULLY AGREE WITH THIS TACTIC AND WILL PROBABLY SEEK TO
USE DEBATE ON OMEGA AS MEANS OF ATTACKING U.S. DEFENSE
INSTALLATIONS IN AUSTRALIA.
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